

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
February 2, 2017

Willowbrook Parkway

Project No. 15-023-01
Project Manager: Kara Kemmler

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$300,000 to the Los Angeles Conservation Corps to construct the Willowbrook Parkway along Compton Creek, in the unincorporated community of Willowbrook, Los Angeles County.

LOCATION: Compton Creek, E 120th Street to El Segundo Blvd, Willowbrook, Los Angeles County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [Bird's-Eye Map](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Site Plan](#)
 - Exhibit 4: [Photos](#)
 - Exhibit 5: [Project Letters](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes an amount not to exceed three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) to the Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC) for construction of the Willowbrook Parkway along Compton Creek, as described in the accompanying staff recommendation, subject to the following conditions:

Prior to the disbursement of any funds, LACC shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

1. A work program including a project schedule, budget, and final construction plans;
 2. All contractors to be employed for the project;
 3. Evidence that that all necessary permits and approvals have been obtained;
 4. A signage plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy funding; and
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5. An agreement with the landowner, the County of Los Angeles, to protect the public interest in all improvements constructed under this grant and assure public access.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public accessways.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
 3. The LACC is a nonprofit corporation recognized as a 501(c)(3) organization under the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, with purposes consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends authorization of up to \$300,000 to the Los Angeles Conservation Corps for construction of the Willowbrook Parkway along Compton Creek, between E 120th Street and El Segundo Blvd in the community of Willowbrook (see maps, Exhibits 1-2). The project will transform an existing approximately one-half mile long flood control access road along the creek into a safe and scenic parkway.

The parkway will provide the disadvantaged community of Willowbrook with desperately needed multi-benefit green space. The project includes removing the asphalt road and replacing it with a permeable decomposed granite (DG) trail which will be gently sloped to guide rainwater into the adjacent bioswale to recharge groundwater. Native plants and trees will be planted along the trail to create new wildlife habitat and provide cooling effects, and over 120 new trees planted will serve to reduce temperatures, create shade, and improve air quality. Interpretive signage communicating ecological principles related to the project, the watershed and climate change will be placed throughout the project to create learning opportunities and engage the passing public, as well as school and community groups. (See Exhibit 3.)

The LA Conservation Corps (LACC) is the nation’s largest urban conservation corps and a highly effective youth development organization. Their programs equip young people with life skills and work experience by employing them in a variety of conservation projects, including creating parks, planting trees, refurbishing hiking trails and building community gardens. The LACC operates and maintains the Compton Creek Natural Park at Washington Elementary School in Compton, funded in part by the Coastal Conservancy. The Natural Park was designed and constructed as a habitat and water conservation park. It is located adjacent to Compton Creek, south of the project site.

Site Description: The Willowbrook Parkway will create a half-mile linear park along Compton Creek within the unincorporated community of Willowbrook in South Los Angeles. The project site is located in one of the most impoverished communities in LA County and unfortunately has one of the highest violent crime rates in the County, exceeding that of neighboring Watts and Compton. Coupled with a median household income rate well below poverty level and an

excessive high school dropout rate, the community of Willowbrook is in serious need of green space and the opportunities provided by involving local youth and community members in the construction and stewardship of the project.

In addition, this area is an urban heat island. Dark surfaces absorb significantly more solar radiation, which causes urban concentrations of roads and buildings to heat more than suburban and rural areas during the day. Materials commonly used in urban areas for pavement and roofs, such as concrete and asphalt, have significantly different thermal properties including heat capacity and thermal conductivity, and surface radiative properties (albedo and emissivity) leading to higher temperatures than surrounding rural areas. Another major contributor is the lack of evapotranspiration due to lack of vegetation in urban areas. With a deficiency of vegetation, cities lose the shade and cooling effect of trees, and the removal of carbon dioxide. The project will remove these causes and effects within the project area by converting the asphalt road to a decomposed granite path and planting over 120 trees and other plants along the path.

The project site is almost completely paved with asphalt as is typical of a LA County Flood control service road along the top of the levee walls along Compton Creek. This stretch of the creek is currently closed off to the public by a gate (see photos of existing conditions, Exhibit 4). LA County Flood Control owns the easement where the project will be constructed and LA County has agreed to maintain the project once built. The project would open up and improve this area for public access, enhancing the environment and the quality of life for the community by providing an aesthetically pleasing and safer alternative for pedestrians and cyclists to navigate between local schools, parks, and shopping or simply offer a place for people to relax.

Project History: The parkway project is the result of a collaborative planning and outreach effort in the community initiated by LA County District 2 Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas. This effort resulted in the formation of a coalition of public and community agencies all contributing their support to the project. Community outreach ramped up in 2012 when the LACC completed the first phase of the parkway from 118th Street to 120th Street, immediately north of the proposed project site. Phase I is a great success and has inspired the local community as well as various public agencies to request that the LACC continue the parkway through the unincorporated community of Willowbrook and on into the City of Compton.

The LACC applied for and secured multiple grants to implement this second project phase, and came to the Conservancy with a funding request being familiar with the Conservancy's history in the Compton Creek watershed, and specifically, the Natural Park downstream of the project.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$300,000
California Natural Resources Agency	\$798,815
Rivers and Mountains Conservancy	\$300,000
<u>Los Angeles County</u>	<u>\$300,000</u>
Project Total	\$1,698,815

The expected source of funds for this project is the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, Public Resources Code section 75001, *et seq.* (“Proposition 84”). Proposition 84 authorizes the use of bond funds for projects that promote public access to the coastal resources of the state. (Public Resources Code § 75060(b)). Section 75060(b) of the Public Resources Code specifically allocates funding to the Conservancy for expenditure pursuant to the Conservancy’s enabling legislation. Consistency of the project with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation is discussed in greater detail immediately below. The proposed project will create a new parkway connecting the community to the creek and expanding the system of accessways that include the Compton Creek Trail and the Los Angeles River Trail ultimately leading to the Pacific coast.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Public Resources Code Section 31400 directs the Conservancy to have a principal role in the implementation of public accessways to and along the state’s coastline. To this end, §31400.3 authorizes the Conservancy to “provide such assistance as is required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of this division.” Funding this coastal access project is consistent with these provisions as well as with §31400.1, which authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to a nonprofit organization for purposes of developing lands suitable for public accessways to the coast. The project is part of a system of accessways that would serve the recreational and transportation needs of residents and visitors from all parts of the county and state.

Section 31409 states that the Conservancy “may award grants and provide assistance to...nonprofit organizations to establish and expand those inland trail systems that may be linked to the California Coastal Trail.” The nearby Los Angeles River Trail is part of the California Coastal Trail and this project will assist in expanding this trail system.

Consistent with §31400.2, staff recommends approval of this project after evaluating the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy in light of the total amount available for coastal public accessway projects, the fiscal resources of the grantee, and the application of factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority. See Consistency with Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines section, below for further discussion.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2013 STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES, AS REVISED JUNE 25, 2015:

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective B, D, and F** of the Conservancy’s 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will open a segment of the creek that is currently not accessible to the public, transforming a dilapidated and unsafe access road into a safe and scenic parkway and building a new connection to existing and planned portions of a path along the creek to the confluence of the LA River, eventually connecting inland urban communities all the way down to the coast.

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective G**, the project will reduce stormwater runoff into the creek by providing infiltration via permeable surfacing and bioswales, thereby protecting coastal water

resources by improving water quality before it flows into the LA River and ultimately the Pacific Ocean.

Consistent with **Goal 7, Objective F and G**, the project will dramatically increase the vegetation, notably large canopy trees, improving the uptake of local emissions. Reducing ambient temperatures by replacing asphalt with vegetation and light-colored, permeable surfaces such as decomposed granite (DG), and plantings trees and other vegetation to both increase emissions uptake and shade buildings and other surfaces, are key strategies identified by both the USFS and the Lawrence Berkeley Lab's Heat Island Group for reducing CO₂ and other GHGs in the air.

It is projected that the 120 newly planted trees planned for the project will sequester approximately 1,275 tons of carbon over the expected life span of the project. LACC intends to ensure continued long term sequestration through the application of "young tree training pruning" practices in the early years of tree growth. This pruning utilizes hand saws, and is designed to direct new tree growth that provides sound branching structure that alleviates the need for carbon intensive pruning as the tree matures. It also is designed to increase the life span of the trees. Both of these factors contribute to greater carbon sequestration. In addition, the trees will be irrigated using separate deep irrigation zones that ensures that the minimal amount of water used will be properly directed to the depth of tree root growth, thereby also contributing to increased life span and better overall growth of the trees, which, in turn, contribute to greater carbon sequestration.

The design of the project is intended to reduce the need for mechanized maintenance. The use of native plants spaced to grow into the space and application of mulch throughout all of the landscape areas will reduce the need for mechanized trimming. During construction and maintenance, crews will be transported in vans rather than in their own individual cars/trucks, thereby reducing transportation gas emissions. All landscape maintenance tasks will be performed using hand/non-power tools, thereby reducing gas emissions normally associated with heretofore traditional landscape maintenance practices.

Consistent with **Goal 9, Objective B**, the project includes interpretive signage to educate the public about the resources related to the creek and climate change.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on October 2, 2014, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:** The proposed project is consistent with the 2014 *Safeguarding California: Reducing Climate Risk* update to the 2009

California Climate Adaptation Strategy which seeks to “support hazard mitigation by investing in green infrastructure and other protective structure to address sea level rise, managed shoreline retreat, stabilize river banks and restore and create wetlands, urban forestry and urban greening to address heat island effects, promote use of cool pavement to reduce urban heat island effects,” (p. 70). The project is also consistent with the California Water Action Plan which promotes increasing groundwater recharge.

4. **Support of the public:** The project enjoys the support and collaboration of Los Angeles County Supervisor Ridley-Thomas, the California Strategic Growth Council, the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, LA County Department of Parks and Recreation, LA County Flood Control District/Public Works, the Compton Creek Task Force, Council for Watershed Health, and Mountains, Recreation and Conservation Authority.
5. **Location:** The project is located along Compton Creek in the community of Willowbrook, in Los Angeles County. Compton Creek is part of the larger LA River watershed which drains to the Pacific Ocean and is heavily impacted by urban development. The new native habitat, reduction of stormwater runoff into the creek, and ground water recharge will protect and enhance coastal watershed resources and attenuate urban heat island effects.
6. **Need:** The grantee has secured other grants from various agencies, however, a funding gap remains and funding sources for access projects are limited. Conservancy funding is needed to enable implementation of the project.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** This project is of significant regional significance, as it is an important piece of the Compton Creek pedestrian and bicycle path planned from 118th Street to the confluence with the LA River. While each section of the path provides a local conservation and recreational benefit to the proximate community, the path will ultimately link communities all along the Creek and LA River, serving residents in several communities from South LA on down to Long Beach as well as visitors to the coast and LA River.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The elevation of the project site is approximately 90 feet above mean sea level. As a result, the site is not located within an area considered vulnerable to sea-level rise by the end of this century.

Additional Criteria

10. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The project provides new public access and recreation benefits while also creating new native habitat and stormwater infiltration features to attenuate climate change effects.
11. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
14. **Readiness:** The grantee has successfully constructed a segment of the parkway just north of the project site and has secured the remainder of the funding needed for this next phase. Permits are in process and the grantee will be ready to start the project in Spring 2017.
17. **Cooperation:** The parkway concept has been a collaborative effort among various agencies and stakeholders. The grantee is working in cooperation with LA County Flood Control who owns the access easement and LA County Parks who will operate and maintain the parkway on design and implementation of the project.

18. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** Currently, the site is an asphalt access road. The project will provide urban greening benefits by demolishing the asphalt road and replacing it with decomposed granite, planting native plants and trees for habitat and shade and recharging groundwater by infiltrating stormwater.
19. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** See the “Consistency with Conservancy’s 2013 Strategic Plan Goals & Objectives” section above.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is categorically exempt from CEQA under 14 Cal. Code of Regs. Sections 15303 and 15311, which allow new construction of small structures and accessory structures including fences and signs and other minor amenities. In addition, the project qualifies as exempt under Section 15304 as it consists of minor alterations in the condition of land, water, and vegetation which do not involve the removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees or grading on land with a slope greater than 10%. Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.